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# U.S. Warns Iran of Determination To Keep Shipping Lanes Open

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The United States has warned Iran in a message sent through Swiss intermediaries that Persian Gulf shipping lanes will be kept open, the White House said yesterday.

The warning comes after Iran test-fired at least one Chinese-built Silkworm antiship missile into the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which oil tankers must pass to reach the open sea from the Persian Gulf. Pentagon sources said yesterday that Iran also has demonstrated other antiship capabilities recently, including the ability to make and sow mines in at least one Iraqi port.

"The president has said we will keep the strait open," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said. "We have a strategic interest in keeping shipping open, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz."

The White House spokesman said his statement was an "intentional message" to buttress the formal note sent to Iran "through the Swiss." Switzerland, which maintains an embassy in Tehran, occasionally represents U.S. interests there.

Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" that "we need to have the freedom to navigate, and our friends and allies need to have the opportunity to send shipments through without being shot at, and without having their ships destroyed . . . We, I think, are fully prepared to do what's necessary to keep the shipping going."

Military officials said yesterday that the United States has considerable firepower near the

Persian Gulf, centered around a battle group consisting of the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk and its 12 escorting warships. The vessels are operating near the 20th parallel, which is outside the gulf and east of the Omani island of Masirah. The battle group's ships and the 18 other U.S. warships in the region remained in what officials described as an "on-call" posture.

The Silkworm missiles were spotted by U.S.

intelligence in late February, sources said, and were trucked to Iran's naval base at Bandar Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz. The Silkworm is credited with a range of 60 miles, flies about 500 miles an hour, can be fired from portable launchers and could be lethal to the giant, slow-moving tankers that plow through the straits, according to intelligence officials.

The Iranians conducted their test firing of the Silkworm from Qeshm Island off Bandar Abbas and then withdrew the missiles to the mainland, presumably storing them at the naval base at Bandar Abbas. Defense officials say Iran has about 12 "launching units" containing several missiles each.

The threat of being hit by Iranian missiles has been worrisome enough to Kuwait to prompt its government to inquire whether the United States would escort ships bound to and from Kuwait through the Persian Gulf.

State Department officials said yesterday that the United States has told the Kuwaiti government that the Navy would provide warships for escort, but the operation has been put on hold pending a formal request from Kuwait.

The other Iranian antiship capability causing concern to the United States is the mining activity. Iranian sailors scooted around the Persian Gulf in aluminum boats powered by 75-horsepower outboard motors last summer and sowed mines of Iranian manufacture in the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr. Several mines were retrieved and analyzed after sea currents ripped them from their moorings, officials said. The mines appeared to be effective against ships in water up to 60 feet deep, the sources said.